Parental Belief and Parental Engagement in Children's learning

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Abstract:

This article reports on a small scale study, examining the influence of parental faith belief on parental engagement with children's learning. The literature surrounding parental engagement and the impact of familial belief on children's outcomes is examined. It is clear from work in the US that familial faith belief has an impact; however, the previous literature is almost entirely quantitative in nature and does not reflect the faith make up of the UK. The article then reports the results of an online survey of parents, examining parental perception of the impact of belief, of faith/belief group and other issues on their engagement with their children's learning. Analysis of the results are presented, and contextualised for the UK.

Keywords:

Parental engagement; parental religious belief; faith group

Introduction

This research brings together two strands of previous work, that relating to parental[1] engagement in children's learning and that which examines the relationship between parental religion and children's outcomes. (We use "parental belief" to encompass parental religious and spiritual belief, as well as the beliefs of parents who profess to have no religion or spirituality, as this term is wider, and allows room for both those parents who profess a religion and those who do not, but still hold views on the subject). In doing this, the research begins the process of bringing together the affective dimension of parental religion (belief) with the behavioural dimension (practice). This research consisted of an online questionnaire and telephone interviews. This article relates to the data from the online questionnaire.

[1] "Parental" here refers to any adult who has primary care for a child, and so could included carers, grandparents, etc.

Previous research has shown the importance and value of parental engagement with children's learning; other research has shown that in the US, at least, parental beliefs can also be a factor in children's achievements. However, even in the US, there has been little qualitative work attempting to link the two, and no previous research on this topic has been undertaken in the UK. To set the context of the current project, we will examine first what the research shows about parental engagement in children's learning, then what the literature shows about the influence of parental beliefs on children's academic achievement.

Literature review

"Parental engagement" is used in this article to mean "parental participation in the learning processes and experiences of their children" (based on (Jeynes, 2005)). Previous research has shown the powerful positive effect that parental engagement can have on children's achievement and outcomes (Harris and Goodall, 2008; Harris and Goodall, 2009; Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

'Parental engagement' as used here is not synonymous with 'parental involvement as used in earlier research, and as delineated by researchers such as Epstein (Epstein and Hollifield, 1996; Epstein and Salinas, 2004) and Hoover-Dempsey (Hoover-Dempsey and Sander, 1995; Walker et al., 2005). Parental involvement, as used in much of the literature of the last century, denoted parents' interactions with the school, as well as, if not in place of, the learning of their children. These forms of involvement are certainly not without value, but have come to be seen as supportive of parental engagement with learning. it is this participation in the learning process which leads to the highest gains in achievement (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003).

Parental engagement in children's learning takes place both in the home and in school, and encompasses not only direct interaction with school work (helping with homework, reading) but a broad range of activities focused on learning more generally (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003; Hoover-Dempsey and Sander, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). Children whose parents are aware of their school work are more likely to achieve well than children whose parents are not so engaged (Spera, 2005).

Steinberg (Steinberg, 2001) and Spera (Spera, 2005) have shown that parental engagement is best conceived of as a whole, rather than as a series of disparate actions. This encompasses the idea of what parents conceive their "role" to be, particularly as such role beliefs include ideas about rights and responsibilities; importantly, they also include "social expectations and scripts that guide group members' behaviour in various situations" (Walker et al., 2005: , p. 89). Overall, the most beneficial form of parenting would seem to be that labelled as "authoritative" by Baumrind (1971). Such parenting is demanding, warm, receptive to communication with children and age appropriate (Steinberg, 2001). Authoritative parenting has been shown to lead to greater maturity and independence on the part of children (Baumrind, 1967; Baumrind, 1989). It has also been related to children having high levels of self esteem and hope (Heaven and Ciarrochi, 2008). While this type of parenting does include exercise of parental control and rule-setting, it is not detrimental to children's sense of autonomy (Aunola and Nurmi, 2005). Along with the imposition of boundaries, authoritative parents show emotional warmth and support; these qualities have been shown to support student achievement (Rosenzweig, 2001; Steinberg et al., 1989).

Learning in the home is a vital part of parental engagement (Sylva et al., 2004). Catsambis has shown that enhanced learning opportunities, coupled with high expectations and continual parental support, are positively associated with academic performance (Catsambis, 2001). Strand (2007) also found that children whose parents rarely quarrelled with their children, provided a home computer or private tuition and were involved with school activities, achieved a better-than-expected outcome at key stage three. Catsambis has shown that parental aspirations, for example, are almost equal to the influence of socioeconomic status (Catsambis, 2001).

Home learning may include any of a number of activities, many of which are not directly linked to the curriculum. These can include discussions with children, sorting activities (laundry), simple maths (while shopping, for example) and family interactions around culture and values (Martinez and Velazquez, 2000; Jackson and Remillard, 2005 ; Snell et al., 2009). Schools may be unaware of these interactions, and consequently underestimate both the frequency and value of these forms of parental engagement.

We do not mean to suggest that parental engagement is the only influence which comes to bear on children's outcomes and achievements: the fact that we have a state school system would belie any such belief, and research within the field of religion itself makes it clear that other influences bear on children's choices (Hoge et al., 1982). However, the literature on parental engagement has made it clear that parental engagement, encouragement, moral support and aspiration are important predictors of children's attainment and achievement.

Parental engagement in children's learning, then, may be seen to be of great importance for children's achievement. However, another factor which has also been shown to affect achievement is parental religious belief.[2]

There has been a good deal of research relating parental belief to children's academic outcomes (Goodall, In Press - 2013). As the research is US based, and is generally retrospective, it concentrates on the differences in achievements between children from Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and "other/none" homes. More recent research has also delineated among different groups of Protestants, using belief in Biblical inerrancy (that is, the belief that the bible is infallible, free from error (Wiehe, 1990)) as a guide.

What is very clear in the US research is that children from Jewish homes achieved better than other groups (Beyerlein, 2004; Burstein, 2007; Chiswick and Huang, 2008; Cohen, 1974; Featherman, 1971; Fejgin, 1995; Keysar and Kosmin, 1995; Lehrer, 1999). Family religious background has a clear effect on the completion of higher education, Beyerlein (2004) found that students from Jewish backgrounds were 1.6 times as likely to earn a degree than those from Evangelical Protestant backgrounds. Leher examined educational attainment of those from Jewish, Catholic and Protestant backgrounds; even when using multiple regressions and controlling for variables such as social economic status and gender, there were still significant differences shown (Lehrer, 1999). Continuing this work later, Leher found that with all variables taken into account, those from conservative Protestant homes achieved

[2] It is not always possible to delineate between "religious belief" and affiliation – that is, someone may claim to be a member of a particular faith group, yet not adhere to all, or even most, of the stated beliefs of that group. While some research has looked at particular beliefs in relation to parental engagement, for the most part, categorisation has been on the basis of self reported affiliation. It is in this sense that "religious belief" is used in this article.

half a year less schooling than those from mainline Protestant backgrounds, and women from Jewish backgrounds attained about half a year more (Lehrer, 2005).

In terms of other groups, children from conservative and inerrantist homes are less likely to take courses which prepare them for university, even when socioeconomic factors were taken into account (Darnell and Sherkat, 1997). Lehrer found that children from conservative Protestant homes attained half a year less schooling than those from mainline Protestant homes, and a year less than students from Jewish homes (Lehrer, 1999). Evangelical Protestants were five times more likely to earn a four year university degree than the more conservative Pentecostal Protestant students; when demographic variables were taken into account, coming from a Pentecostal Protestant background still reduced the chances of obtaining a degree by 74% and coming from a Conservative Protestant background reduced the odds by 56% (Beyerlein, 2004).

There is as yet insufficient data to understand fully why these disparities exist (Goodall, In Press - 2013). Suggestions have been made in terms of investment (Lehrer, 1999; Lehrer, 2005; Lehrer, 2006; Meng and Sentance, 1984); this model proposes that higher educational returns are the result of greater parental investment. Investment here is understood to include a wide range of activities, including interest, value and aspiration.

A second set of explanations - or perhaps better yet, a subset of explanations – centre around more specific parenting behaviours. These behaviours include the value placed on obedience (Ellison and Sherkat, 1993), overall involvement with children (King, 2003), and different views of the nature of authority in the family (Bartkowski and Ellison, 1995). Neither of these suggestions, however, has been tested by wide scale qualitative work. The project on which this paper is based, seeks to begin that investigation.

Methodology

This research took place over three months, from July to September, 2011. It consisted of an online survey and telephone interviews; the results of the survey are reported here.

The population for this research was, at its greatest extent, all parents. In reality, the sample were parents who were invited to participate through a range of means, most of which were reliant on communication and social media. These included twitter, facebook, livejournal, email to groups and direct email to individuals. Groups contacted included general parenting groups as well as religious groups, particularly when it was possible to find a contact who dealt with family or parenting issues.

This means of recruitment means that the sample was a convenience one (Teddlie and Yu, 2007), made up of those who could be reached by such means. Further, the sample was self selecting, in that they were able to respond (had access to an internet enabled computer to respond to the online survey, spoke English well enough to understand and respond, etc.), and perhaps most importantly, were interested enough in the subject to choose to respond.

Although the majority of the responses to the questionnaire were narrative in nature, it was possible to perform some quantitative analysis on these answers. This was done by finding the number of times a phrase or concept was used (generally using the coding framework as a basis), by groups of respondents; a factor analysis was then undertaken, to add greater depth to the results. The numbers involved are relatively small and therefore this information is presented with caution, to show indications rather than to make definitive claims. Nonetheless, some of these indications are of interest.

Overall, there were over 190 responses to the questionnaire. The breakdown of respondents, categorized by belief group, is as follows: Agnostics, 13 respondents (7% of the total); Atheists, 33 respondents (17%); Buddhists, 10 (5%); Christians, 115 (60%); Jewish3 4 (2%); Muslim 2 (1%); Pagan 4 (2%); and Other 12 (6%).

Table 1 Respondents

Group	Total respondents	Percentage of total
Agnostic	13	7

[3] "Jewish" is used in preference to "Jew" as respondents to the interview section objected to the term "Jew" as it has been for so long a term of abuse.

Atheist	33	17
Buddhist	10	5
Christian	115	60
Jewish	4	2
Muslim	2	1
Pagan	4	2
Other	12	6

Table 2 How do you define parental engagement?

Atheist	Agnostic	Atheist	Christian	Other	Total
Homework	7	20	72	2	**135**
In school activities	4	16	53	4	**101**
General interest	4	5	29		**49**
Moral support/modelling	15	19	84	5	**160**
Independence	5	18	16	1	**71**
Other	13	44	150	12	**307**
Governor/PTA – formal role	1	8	19	1	**40**
Reading to/with/support	9	9	57	4	**97**
Conversation	9	25	59	1	**134**
Parental learning		1	12	3	**18**
Monitor/support progress	5	8	26	1	**79**

Table 3 Do your religious beliefs have any bearing on your attitude toward parental engagement?

	Atheist	Christian	Pagan	Other	Agnostic
Yes	3	92	3	4	2
No	8	19	2	2	1

This may be related to the Census data for the UK[4], which reported that Christians made up 71.6% of the population, Muslims 2.7%, Jewish people. 0.5%, Buddhists 0.3% and those of no reported religion, 15.5%. Muslims and those of Jewish origin are therefore over represented in the questionnaire sample in relation to the population data from the last UK census, as are Buddhists. All respondents were parents, of at least one child. There was no age limit for the child in question.

It is not possible to calculate response rates for this questionnaire, due to the means of finding respondents. It is not possible to give an accurate estimate of the numbers of people who may have seen the notification of the survey on twitter or facebook feeds, for example, nor to know if announcements were made orally within specific groups who had received requests to publicise the survey.

Questionnaire

The questionnaire was hosted online through Google Docs. This free facility allows the generation of multiple types of question, and presents results in both spreadsheet and (where applicable), chart form, providing percentages where possible.

The survey was publicised through a variety of means, including word of mouth. Social media (facebook twitter, livejournal, academic web pages) were used, and 154 contacts were made with individuals or organisations; some of these organisations published information about the survey to their members, which may account for the larger than average representation of some groups (Baptists among the Christians, for example).

The analysis of the qualitative data used both a priori and grounded coding. In using grounded theory to support the coding of responses to open questions, the researchers sought to draw theory from the experience of the respondents, as related in their answers. Grounded theory was proposed in the 1960s by Glaser and Strauss (Suddaby, 2006); it requires a constant iteration between theory and data (Urquhart et al., 2010; Raduescu and Vessey, 2011).

[4] As this was an online survey, it is not possible to trace the origins of all respondents; location was not a field in the questionnaire. Contextual analysis shows that some small percentage of respondents were from outside the UK.

The original coding framework was based on the literature in the fields described above Some of the elements of the framework arose from our knowledge of the respondent group, (such as the choices of religion/faith, the types of schools which might be providing education for children, and the ways in which religion/faith might interact with parental engagement). Most of the rest of the framework arose from work which highlighted the means parents use to engage with their children's learning, such as previous reviews of parental engagement (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011; Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003), studies dealing directly with parents' responses (Peters et al., 2007) and other studies of parental engagement (Martinez and Velazquez, 2000; Hoover-Dempsey and Sander, 1995; Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler, 1997). The framework was then expanded, to take account of responses which either did not fit into the previous framework, or called for a more nuanced delineation between codes. Codes which were added, for example, included "discussion/conversation", "formal involvement in schooling – governing, membership of PTA" and "reading to/with children". These codes were added to allow parental voice to be more authentically reported, as these concepts did not fit neatly within previous categories.

The coding framework was then applied to previously coded data. Throughout this process, the two researchers involved were in communication and dialogue about the framework, to provide interoperator reliability. In deference to Armstrong's points about inter-rater reliability, it is worth pointing out that both researchers are based in the field of education, but come from different academic backgrounds, and only one had previous experience in the field of parental engagement (Armstrong et al., 1997).

Results

The results from the questionnaire are presented in a series of tables. The first 4 of these show the results from each of the four most populous groups, to particular concepts in the survey. These four groups, Agnostics, Atheists, Christians and "other", provide a much sounder base for analysis, having as they do the largest number of respondents. (The smaller groups will be discussed only where they show significance differences to these groups).

The first table relates to parental conceptions of engagement with children's learning. The table represents the concepts which were present in the open answers to the questionnaire.

The second table reports on parental views of the connection (or lack of it) between their beliefs and their engagement in their children's learning.

Of the four most populous groups, it is not perhaps surprising that Christians gave the most positive responses to "Do your religious beliefs have any bearing on your attitude toward parental engagement?". Responses included, "Because God tells us to, so parents are involved in every aspect of their children's lives" (Christian); "It is a fundamental idea of Catholic Education that parents are the primary educators of their children" (Christian); " I think it is vital that Christian beliefs do impact on all the roles we have in our lives, but especially with parenting" (Christian). Parents from other groups echoed this idea, "I believe that the discipline which following an Orthodox Jewish lifestyle and the emphasis which Judaism places on learning and teaching has an impact on the school's and our approach to bringing up our children" (Jewish); " Islam teaches us that educating our children is important" (Muslim). In a similar vein, it is not surprising that Atheists had the highest number of responses for the negative response to this question; "Faith or the lack of it should not have a place in the education of my children" (Atheist); although some Atheist parents recognised an influence of their beliefs, "We don't practice a faith and that must influence what our children learn" (Atheist).

The raw responses to "Do those who share your beliefs give you any guidance or advice" (Atheist) and a reference to the British Humanist Society's resources. help in relation to parental engagement?" are shown in Table 4. It is interesting that three atheist parents answered this positively; responses included comments such as, "As a group, Atheists are not very organised but like-minded friends have offered advice" (Atheist).

Table 4 Did those who share your beliefs give you any guidance or help in relation to your children's learning?

	Atheist	Christian	Other	Atheist	Agnostic
Yes	3	65	2	3	5
No	1	15	2	1	

Table 5 Is there anything in your faith community that comments on the involvement of parents in their children's learning?

	Atheist	Christian	Other	Agnostic
Yes, texts		7		
Yes, other		21	2	1
No		8		

Table 5 reports responses to a question asking about whether or not there was, within the faith/belief community, anything that commented on the involvement of parents with the learning of their children. Again, Christians have the highest number of responses. At times, this support is informal, "We always share problems and give advice to each other about anything anyone needs in our life group. The one I go to is aimed at mums" (Christian), at other times, more formalised, in Sunday schools, other forms of learning or online support. Other parents also agreed, "Our Buddhist teachers were always happy to discuss aspects of supporting our children in learning and support us. We also received support from our Buddhist community" (Buddhist); "Of course, the 'community' both the religious one and the (way, way, more important) informal cultural one support our engagement with our child's learning. It is a communal expectation." (Jewish).

Not all answers were positive. "Why on earth would they!!"(Atheist); "Raising of the child is a private matter in Paganism - it's not a group matter" (Pagan), "They pretty much leave us alone to get on with it."(Christian), with even a stark comment such as, "You are kidding, right?" (Christian)

By the question reported in Table 5, we sought to understand what it was – if anything – in particular faith groups that people felt supported their engagement with children's learning. One respondent was clear that Vatican documents had been an influence on their parenting; " It is all laid out in the Apostolic Exhortation "Familiaris Consortio"" (Christian). In a similar vein, another respondent commented, "Islam places a very high value on learning and teaching. It is part of the very fabric of the Faith." (Muslim). Other parents spoke of informal methods of support, "Mutual refuge in terms of discussion & shared experiences." (Buddhist), or a mixture of formal and informal support, "Mixing with a like-minded group of parents, regular learning groups for parents, support from the synagogue etc." (Jewish).

Table 6 shows the occurrence of a separate groups of concepts which arise throughout the data.

There were a number of items which could not be coded on their own; as such, these went into a catch-all category, as shown in Table 6. Further disaggregation shows that among these "other" activities, family trips out and/or acquiring resources were by far the most common (61 mentions overall). Of these, the most frequently mentioned concept was that of trips out of the home, to museums, the theatre, libraries or other places where learning could take place (often linked to the school curriculum). As one respondent put it, "all the middle class stuff!" (Christian)

Another common idea within this was that of incorporating learning into daily life (mentioned 27 times). This category included everyday activities such as eating together, playing games (including computer games), and singing together. This was followed by extracurricular activities, such as formal learning (music, dance lessons) or other activities (particularly sport, also clubs and the Duke of Edinburgh award).

Table 6 "Other" category in relation to parental engagement with children's learning

Concept	Number of mentions
Educational activities	61
Sport/outdoor	9
Extracurricular activities/other learning	18
Daily life	27
Control of TV, games, radio	2
Social interaction	2

Table 7 Responses per mention

	Duty	Obligation	Responsibility
Atheist			3
Christian	5	2	28
Other		1	1
Jewish	1		1
Muslim			
Buddhist	1		
Pagan	1		

Table 8 Responses per respondent

	Duty	Obligation	Responsibility
Atheist	1		2

Christian	3	2	22
Other		1	1
Jewish	1		1
Muslim			
Buddhist			1
Pagan	1		

Tables 7 and 8 present the raw results for three distinct concepts: duty, obligation and responsibility. Table 7 presents the number of times a concept was mentioned by a particular group of respondents, (e.g. one respondent could have contributed more than one mention of the concept). Table 8 reports the number of times different individuals within groups used these terms/concepts.

For many parents, responsibility for children's learning was a given. "I take responsibility for my child not just because I love her, but because I have been given this duty as a parent" (Christian); "... my faith offers an additional perspective through which I understand humanity and human potential to be sacred, and therefore education - bringing into fullness of life - as a sacred duty and responsibility." (Christian); "That's like asking, "do you think it's important to ensure that your children are fed and clothed?" Education is as important as those things and it is our duty and our pleasure to do everything we can to promote our child's intellectual development. The overall responsibility for something so very important cannot be entrusted to a school, or anyone else." (Jewish); This emphasis on responsibility also came through as being unaligned to religious belief for some parents, " surely being interested in your child's education is a matter of conscience and duty not because you believe your god/s told you too" (Pagan)

Factor analysis

As mentioned above, raw scores are problematic for a sample such as this, which is heavily skewed in relation to number of respondents from different groups. To go some way toward overcoming this imbalance, a simple factor analysis was carried out for all of the coded items. The use of a very basic type of factor analysis here allows the reader to see not only which groups mentioned a specific idea more often (which is obviously skewed by the number of respondents) but also how much relative importance is placed on these concepts within the groups themselves. Thus,

if a concept has a high factor (approaching or above one), then it is possible to see that this concept has a greater relative importance for that group of respondents than other items with a lower factor. Table 7 shows this analysis for the four most populous groups; a full table of factors will be found in Appendix 2.

Table 9 Factor analysis of the four most populous groups

	Atheist Factor	Christian Factor	Other Factor	Agnostic Factor
Homework	0.9	0.88	0.24	2.6
In school activities	0.9	0.87	0.38	0.5
General interest	0.6	0.98		1.1
Moral Support/Modelling	0.7	0.87	0.51	1.3
Independence	1.5	0.37	0.23	1
Other	0.8	0.81	0.38	0.6
Formal Role[5] in school	1.2	0.79	0.41	0.3
Reading[6]	0.5	0.97	0.68	1.3
Conversation	1	0.73	0.11	0.9
Parental learning	0.3	1.1	2.76	
Monitor /support progress	2.3	0.88	0.33	1.4
Beliefs influence attitude toward PE - yes	0.1	1.25	0.53	0.22
Beliefs influence attitude toward PE - no	1.1	0.77	0.8	0.8
Group guidance - yes	0.2	1.19	0.35	
Group guidance - no	0.26	1.1	1.5	
Support from Group texts		1.29		
Group support other		0.87	0.83	0.3
Nothing in group to support PE		1.66		
Criticality	1.8	0.255	0.63	
Indoctrination	1.95		2.7	
Inclusivity / diversity	2.1		0.78	

Table 10 Factor analysis of gaining guidance from belief group

Christian	Muslim	Jewish	Buddhist
1.19	2.1	4.39	1.3

[5] Governor, member of the PTA/PTFA
[6] Reading to, reading with, support for reading

Table 11 Support from texts and other means from belief group

	Christian	Muslim	Jewish	Buddhist	Pagan
Texts	1.29	22.2	11.25		
Other support	0.87		11.29	1.3	1.25

Christians had the highest factor for receiving guidance in both text and other formats. Christians also had the highest factor for the positive response to “Did those who share your beliefs give you any guidance of help in relation to your children’s learning?”. Those chose the “Other” option had the highest factor for a negative response.

It is not surprising that of these four, Christians had the highest factor for gaining guidance from their communities, as two of the other groups are, in this sense, non-groups; they are placed together due to a lack to unified belief of unsurety of belief. Overall, however, Christians did not fare as well as other faith based groups on this topic, as can be seen from table 10, below.

In relation to the question on the positive value of texts or other supports for parents, Christians again lagged behind other faith groups.

The highest factor overall was from Muslim respondents , and the second Jewish respondents, both giving a positive response to the question about whether or not there were “texts, or other things” within the faith group that supported parental engagement. Muslim parents had a factor of 22.2 and Jewish parents, a factor of 11.25. In contrast, Christians have a factor of only .87. Again, the numbers in both groups are low, and particularly so for the Jewish respondents, so it is not possible to make definitive claims. However, it is perhaps indicative of the status of the Christian parents as being part of the majority religion, in a country which overtly connects Christianity with main stream schooling, that these parents felt less need to rely on faith-based texts in relation to engaging with their children’s learning. Perhaps this again harks back to what Arweck and Nesbitt found, that the majority of parents in their study relied on the schools to give their children a foundation of knowledge in relation to faith (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2011); this will obviously be easier for parents who adhere to the faith incorporated into the school system.

Certain responses stand out in this table. Agnostic parents are far more likely to mention homework as an example of parental engagement than were any other group of parents. They were also more likely to mention moral support than the other three groups, although the margin was smaller in this instance. Atheist parents were more likely to mention the concept of independence, and also more likely to mention formal involvement in the school, (such as being a governor).

Atheist parents were more likely to highlight the importance of instilling or fostering criticality with their children, and also of fostering a sense of inclusivity or respect for diversity. "I have shared my rational and evidence-based approach with the children, encouraging them to challenge and test the accepted place of religious belief in 21st century life in the UK." (Atheist); "...essentially I want my children to have the ability to question whatever they are told and find the evidence either to support or demolish the argument they have heard. This goes for teachers, youth leaders, priests, me, everyone. Surely the purpose of education is to give children the skills and tools to find things out for themselves rather than take someone's - anyone's - word that something is true. Nullius in verba!" (Atheist).

Christian parents were more likely to mention reading to/with their children, while atheists were more likely to mention being involved with their children through conversation. Christian parental also had the highest factor for the positive response among the four most populous groups to "Did those who share your beliefs given you any guidance or help in relation to your children's learning?" " My faith community have lots of guidance on the role of Christian parents which I take very seriously. In particular that it is our duty to nurture our children so that they can realise their God-given talents to contribute positively to the world we live in " (Christian Parent)Those who chose the "other" option had the highest factor for a negative response. Christians also had the highest factor in these groups for receiving guidance in both text and any other format.

Those who chose “other” were by far more likely to be involved in what might be termed “parental learning”, "...did a short course on maths in primary schools" (Atheist) while atheists were more likely to mention monitoring or supporting children’s progress. Parents from the "Other" category had the highest factor rating for concern over their children being indoctrinated. " I wish for my children never to

be brainwashed" (Other); " I don't indoctrinate my child with my beliefs and I think it is tantamount to cruelty, that parents can do this." (Other), while perhaps the most vehement comment about this category came from an Atheist parent, "Atheism is not a belief in any religious sense, it is just an absence of belief in the irrational claims of religions due to a complete lack of evidence. Therefore, most atheist parents don't indoctrinate their children with 'atheism', they just educate them with rational facts, not superstitious myths." (Atheist)

Discussion

> " Your questions are phrased in a very non-Jewish way in that you seem to have separated faith and belief from culture. Learning is absolutely central to Jewish culture, built into every ritual and every rite of passage. Whether one is a secular Jew or a religious Jew, education is likely to be highly regarded because it's central to the culture. In an orthodox context this will manifest itself in religious learning but the nature and extent of parental involvement will be similar across the board." (Jewish)

It could be argued that although the questionnaire at least appeared to affect this separation, for the Christian parents this may not have been an issue – particularly in light of Arweck and Nesbitt's findings that parents expected schools to provide basic religious information (Arweck and Nesbitt, 2010). Christian parents could expect this sort of teaching as a part of the normal course of schooling in the UK. This may account for a good many answers from Christian parents, as mainstream schooling in the UK, for the most part, takes place in the milieu of an established, Christian church. It may also account for some of the answers from parents who identified as atheist, who provided a concentration on avoiding indoctrination.

Overall, it would seem from the questionnaire that most parents are involved in activities which are precisely those which the literature suggests are of benefit (Goodall, In Press - 2013) – staying interested in their children's learning (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003), providing support for learning (Harris and Goodall, 2008; Harris and Goodall, 2009), reading to and with their children (Redding et al., 2004;

Norwood et al., 1997; Scott et al., 2010), and, for a smaller but still significant number, involvement with the school (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003). . This may serve to reiterate the findings of previous research (Goodall and Vorhaus, 2011) that schools underestimate the amount of engagement parents have with their children's learning. It also provides a heartening view of parental engagement. This would again accord with previous research, which has shown that parents are increasingly ready to take responsibility for their children's learning (Peters et al., 2007). It also shows that respondents took a wide view of children's learning: they did not confine their answers to only topics related to school, but included sports, other types of learning, and family outings as instances of involvement in learning.

Of particular interest is the concept of giving moral support, which received the highest number of mentions for an individual code (160); " ...teaching by example is one of the best ways to encourage your children to do what you do - e.g. if they see you praying or being polite then they are more likely repeat that behaviour." (Jewish). In discussions with a wide range of secondary students, this was their preferred understanding of parental engagement (Harris and Goodall, 2008). While no parent related that they took this stance at the request of their children, this does again argue for congruence between children's needs and parental actions.

The literature is clear – as are parents in this survey – that parental engagement is not simply a set of individual, unconnected actions, but rather is an entire way of being (Goodall, 2012; Spera, 2005; Steinberg, 2001) This also lends support to the findings of previous research, which shows that parental perception of their engagement with learning is not the same as the perception of staff (Harris and Goodall, 2008).

Another interesting finding is that relating to criticality. Christian parents had a very low factor (0.25, representing only four mentions by Christian parents), while the highest factor for this category came from Muslim parents, with a factor of 3.8 followed by Pagan and Atheist parents at 1.9 and 1.8 respectively. This again may be related to the mainstream nature of most Christian groups in the UK, and the established nature of Christianity within the English school system.Conclusions drawn from such a small sample must, of course, remain tentative, but it is possible that parents who are not members of this established tradition see more of a need to

engage their children in activities which lead those young people to engage critically with that system.

Conclusion

There is only limited literature on the influence of parental religious belief on children's academic outcomes in the UK. And in spite of the clear impact of familial belief on achievement in the US, there is little overall qualitative work that examines how the one impacts on the other. The small scale project reported here begins that process for the UK, showing some indications at least of how parents from different believe backgrounds interact with their children's learning.

One of the most prominent findings is that, among the parents who responded to the survey, the practices which are considered to be of value in parental engagement are already taking place. parents are involved in a broad range of activities with their children outside of school (Desforges and Abouchaar, 2003) ; they strive to monitor and support school work (Spera, 2005), and particularly through discussion, to foster learning in the home (Martínez et al., 2008; Snell et al., 2009; Sylva et al., 2004). These are all parenting behaviours which contribute to children's academic achievements, and were present throughout the range of beliefs represented in the questionnaire. These findings come at a time when there is renewed interest in and emphasis on parental engagement, for example in the new Ofsted criteria, which require schools to show the impact of effective parental engagement as part of a judgement of an outstanding school.

There were few glaring disparities between belief groups, as seen above, and none of these related to issues seen by the literature as fundamental to children's attainment.

As yet, there is no way to collate children's academic attainment with familial faith/religious background in the UK. However, the results of this survey, although not large enough to be generalised, do suggest that perhaps the disparities between belief groups seen in the US would either not be replicated in the UK, or perhaps more likely, would not result in such large gaps between groups.

It has not been possible to discuss the socioeconomic factors which influence either parental engagement or achievement, as this data was not collected. The high response from Christians, Muslims and those of Jewish origins to the questions about guidance over all relates to the concept mentioned above about the influence of social groups on role construction; for some respondents within these groups, engaging with their children's learning is part of their expected role as a parent.

Appendix 1. Coding Framework

Appendix 1. Coding framework

1. How would you describe your religious belief(s)?
1.1. Christian
1.2. Jewish
1.3. Muslim
1.4. Sikh
1.5. Buddhist
1.6. Pagan
1.7. Agnostic
1.8. Atheist
1.9. Other
1.10. Further discussion
2. How many children do you have?
2.1. Ages?
3. How would you define parental engagement?
3.1. Homework
3.2. In school activities
3.3. General interest
3.4. Moral support/modelling
3.5. Independence
3.6. Other
3.7. Governor/PTA – formal role
3.8. Reading to/with/support
3.9. Conversation
3.10. Parental learning
3.11. Monitor/support progress
4. Do you think PE is important in relation to children's learning?
4.1. No
4.2. Yes
4.3. Other
5. How were your children educated?
5.1. State school
5.1.1. State faith school
5.2. Home schooled
5.3. Independent school
6. Do your religious beliefs have any bearing on your attitude toward parental engagement?
6.1. Yes
6.2. No
7. Did those who share your beliefs give you any guidance or help in relation to your children's learning?
7.1. Yes
7.2. No
8. Is there anything in your faith community that comments on the involvement of parents in their children's learning?
8.1. Yes, texts
8.2. Yes, other

8.3. No
9. Is there anything else you would like to say in relation to parental beliefs and involvement in their children's learning?
10. Other issues
10.1. Criticality
10.2. Indoctrination
10.3. Inclusivity/diversity
10.4. Parental voice

Appendix 2. Table of results including factors

(Highest factor for each response is in bold)

Questionnaire item	Atheist	%	*Factor*	Christian	%	*Factor*	Pagan	%	*Factor*	Other	%	*Factor*	Muslim	%	*Factor*	Jewish	%	*Factor*	Buddhist	%	*Factor*	Agnostic		*Factor*	Total mentions
3.1	20	14.8	*0.9*	72	53.3	*0.88*	1	0.07	*0.03*	2	1.48	*0.24*	1	0.74		7	5.9	*2.95*	5	3.7	*0.74*	7	18.8	***2.6***	**135**
3.2	16	15.8	*0.9*	53	52.4	*0.87*	3	2.9	***1.45***	4	3.9	*0.38*	1	1		1	1	*.5*	3	2.9	*0.58*	4	3.9	*0.5*	**101**
3.3	5	10.2	*0.6*	29	59.1	*0.98*	4	8.1	***4***										2	4	*0.8*	4	8.1	*1.1*	**49**
3.4	19	11.8	*0.7*	84	52.5	*0.87*	3	1.8	*0.9*	5	3.1	*0.51*	4	2.5		6	3.75	*1.87*	5	3.1	*0.62*	15	9.3	***1.3***	**160**
3.5	18	25.3	*1.5*	16	22.5	*0.37*	7	9.8	***4.9***	1	1.4	*0.23*	2	2.8		2	2.8	*1.4*	2	2.8	*0.56*	5	7	*1*	**71**
3.6	44	14.3	*0.8*	150	48.8	*0.81*	9	2.9	***1.45***	12	3.9	*0.38*	5	1.6		12	3.9	*1.95*	18	5.8	*1.16*	13	4.2	*0.6*	**307**
3.7	8	20	*1.2*	19	47.5	*0.79*	1	2.5	***1.25***	1	2.5	*0.41*	1	2.5					1	2.5	*0.5*	1	2.5	*0.3*	**40**
3.8	9	9.2	*0.5*	57	58.7	*0.97*	2	2	*1*	4	4.1	*0.68*				3	3	*1.5*	4	4.12	*0.82*	9	9.2	***1.3***	**97**
3.9	25	18.6	*1*	59	44	*0.73*	1	0.7	*0.03*	1	0.7	*0.11*				5	11.1	*5.5*	9	6.7	***1.28***	9	6.7	*0.9*	**134**
3.1	1	5.5	*0.3*	12	66.6	*1.1*	1	5.5	*0.5*	3	16.6	***2.76***													**18**
3.11	8	16.3	***2.3***	26	53	*0.88*				1	2	*0.33*				1	2	*1*				5	10.2	*1.4*	**49**
6.1	3	2.4	*0.1*	92	75.4	***1.25***	3	2.4	*1.2*	4	3.2	*0.53*	1	0.8		7	5.7	*2.8*	7	5.7	*1.14*	2	1.6	*0.22*	**122**
6.2	8	19.5	***1.1***	19	46.3	*0.77*	2	4.8	*2.4*	2	4.8	*0.8*				1	2.4	*1.2*				1	5.4	*0.8*	**41**
7.1	3	3.2	*0.2*	65	71.4	***1.19***	1	1	*0.5*	2	2.1	*0.35*	2	2.1		4	4.39	*2.19*	6	6.5	*1.3*	5			**91**
7.2	1	4.5	*0.26*	15	68.1	***1.1***	2	9	*4.5*	2	9	*1.5*				1	4.5	*2.25*							**22**
8.1				8	77.7	*1.29*							2	**22.2**											**9**
8.2				21	52.5	*0.87*	1	2.5	*1.25*	2	5	*0.83*				9	22.5	***11.29***	6	6.5	***1.3***	1	2.5	*0.3*	**40**
8.3				8	100	***1.66***																			**8**
10.1	8	30.7	***1.8***	4	15.3	*0.255*	1	3.8	*1.9*	1	3.8	*0.63*	1	3.8		1	3.8	*1.8*	2	4	*0.8*				**26**

10.2	4	33.3	*1.95*				1	8.3	***4.15***	***2***	16.6	*2.7*							1	2.5	*0.5*				**12**
10.3	15	35.7	*2.1*				5	11.9	***5.95***	2	4.7	*0.78*	2						3	2.9	*0.58*				**42**

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